

IN SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

MAY 21, 1828.

MR. SILSBEE MADE THE FOLLOWING REPORT :

The Committee on Commerce, to whom was referred a report and plan of the survey of the island of Nantucket, with a view to the erection of a breakwater at that place, and several memorials concerning the same;

REPORT:

That Nantucket has about twenty-seven thousand tons of shipping, the greater part of which is in vessels of the average burthen of about 350 tons, employed in the whale fishery. As there is only about nine feet of water, at high tide, upon the bar which lies off their present harbor, the owners of these whaling ships are subjected to the necessity of seeking a remote harbor for the transaction of their ordinary business; and that of Edgartown, in the adjacent island of Martha's Vineyard, being the nearest, although thirty miles distant, is usually selected; to which, by means of lighters, the outward cargoes, provisions, and every article appertaining to the equipment of these vessels, are transported, and from which their return cargoes (amounting, the last year, to 34,000 casks of oil) are taken to Nantucket.

The inconvenience and expense of attending, personally, to the commencement and termination of their voyages, at a harbor thirty miles distant, the expense of transporting the entire cargoes and stores of their vessels, and the great hazard to which not only the property thus transported, but also the lives of the owners, are exposed during the winter months, (in the course of which a passage from one to the other of these islands is always more or less dangerous, and sometimes impracticable, for two or three weeks,) must be considered such a tax on their commerce as none but the most enterprising and persevering of our citizens could sustain, in competition with those more favorably located.

In consequence of the dangerous shoals by which the island of Nantucket is surrounded, (without any harbor in its vicinity where vessels which may be overtaken by a head wind, or storm, can find shelter,) there is no part of our extensive sea coast which mariners approach with more anxiety than that about this island.

The whole coasting trade between New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, on the one side, and Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine, on the other side of Nantucket, passes between that island and the main land, at all seasons of the year; and the trade between those eastern and all the southern States, use this route during the win-

ter season, and pass within a mile or two of the spot designated on the plan of the Engineers for the erection of the breakwater.

It is estimated that not less than eight thousand vessels annually pass through this Sound, which would participate in the advantages which a safe anchorage near Nantucket would afford, including in this number of vessels many which are employed in the East and West India trades, and use this passage in the winter season. It is, therefore, manifest, that the commerce, and particularly the coasting trade, of the six before named States, would be almost as directly and as essentially benefited by the erection of this breakwater, as the commerce of Nantucket would be. There is now no harbor between Martha's Vineyard and Cape Cod, a distance of about 140 miles; and it is not an uncommon occurrence to see, in the winter season, 40 or 50 vessels lying at the former place waiting for such a wind as may probably carry them past the shoals which lie between those two harbors. This detention, as well as the greater part of the danger which they have now to encounter, (which is such that not a year passes in which there are not more or less losses sustained,) would be prevented by an intermediate harbor at Nantucket, from whence, with a favorable wind, they might reach that of Cape Cod between daylight and dark, and thereby avoid the increased hazard to which they are exposed in passing those shoals in the night.

The practicability of erecting a breakwater at Nantucket, and some of the important benefits to be derived from it, are shown by the report of the Engineers who made the survey; and the cost of such a one as would afford shelter for fifty vessels, is estimated by them at \$898,393 14; and, of one sufficient for only twenty-five vessels, at \$509,538 57. The Committee, after full consideration of the subject, have come to the conclusion, that the plan of the largest should be preferred; and, as the amount estimated for its completion is not disproportioned to the extensive and valuable trade of the six commercial States which would be so much benefited by it, they recommend such an annual appropriation as can, without embarrassment to the Treasury, be advantageously expended upon the execution of the work, and report the accompanying bill.